



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Kim Amendola – NOAA
(727) 551-5707

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2007

NOAA Announces Rule to Protect North Atlantic Right Whales from Gillnet Entanglement in Southeast U.S.

Rule effective annually from November 15 – April 15

NOAA Fisheries Service finalized a rule implementing permanent annual restrictions on gillnet fishing in the Southeast U.S. during right whale calving season (Nov. 15 – April 15). The rule was published in the Federal Register today (72 FR 34632) and regulations take effect in 30 days on July 25, 2007.

The waters off the Southeast U.S. are the only known calving area for North Atlantic right whales. This area is predominantly used by reproducing females and their calves from November to April each year. Entanglement in fixed fishing gear is one of the greatest threats to this species. There may be as few as 300 North Atlantic right whales left.

"Calving right whales represent the future of this endangered species," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "We are implementing this rule to protect females and their calves while they are in this critical area."

The final rule includes the following actions:

- (1) Expands the Southeast U.S. Restricted Area to include waters within 35 nautical miles of the South Carolina coast (south of the Little River Inlet at the South Carolina/North Carolina border).
- (2) Divides the Southeast U.S. Restricted Area at 29°00' N latitude into two areas – Southeast U.S. Restricted Areas North and South.
- (3) Restricts gillnetting within the Southeast U.S. Restricted Area during the right whale calving season.

Specifically, the rule prohibits gillnet fishing and possession in the Southeast U.S. Restricted Area North each year from Nov. 15 – April 15, with an exemption for transiting through this area if gear is stowed in accordance with the rule. Gillnet fishing is prohibited annually in the Southeast U.S. Restricted Area South from Dec. 1 – March 31, with limited exemptions for gillnet fishing for sharks and Spanish mackerel. The final rule is based on the proposed rule and public comments received on the proposed rule.

During the 2006-2007 calving season, 20 births and 2 calf mortalities were recorded. North Atlantic right whales are listed as "Endangered" under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. NOAA Fisheries Service is directed by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to reduce incidental serious injury and mortality of marine mammal stocks in commercial fishing operations.

– more –

